

# VITAMIN C QUICKFACTS



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Vitamin C is a nutrient in food that people need to stay healthy. It helps heal wounds and protects the body from infections, viruses, and damage that naturally occurs when the body turns food into energy.

## How much vitamin C do I need?

It depends on your age. Here are the amounts people of different ages should get, on average, each day in milligrams (mg):

Birth to 6 months	40 mg
Infants 7–12 months	50 mg
Children 1–3 years	15 mg
Children 4–8 years	25 mg
Children 9–13 years	45 mg
Teens 14–18 years (boys)	75 mg
Teens 14–18 years (girls)	65 mg
Adults (men)	90 mg
Adults (women)	75 mg
Pregnant teens	80 mg
Pregnant women	85 mg
Breastfeeding teens	115 mg
Breastfeeding women	120 mg

If you smoke, add 35 mg to the numbers listed above to get the amount you need each day.

## What foods provide vitamin C?

Fruits and vegetables are the best sources of vitamin C. You can get enough vitamin C by eating a variety of foods including citrus fruits (such as oranges and grapefruit) and their juices, as well as red and green pepper, kiwifruit, broccoli, strawberries, baked potatoes, and tomatoes. Vitamin C is added to some foods and beverages (check the product labels).

## What kinds of vitamin C dietary supplements are available?

Most multivitamins have vitamin C. Vitamin C is also available alone as a dietary supplement or combined with other nutrients.

## Am I getting enough vitamin C?

Most people get enough vitamin C. However, people who don't eat a variety of foods might not get as much vitamin C as they need. People who smoke might also have trouble getting enough vitamin C because they need higher amounts. Some people with cancer and people with kidney disease on dialysis might also not get enough vitamin C.

## VITAMIN C FACT SHEET

### What happens if I don't get enough vitamin C?

Vitamin C deficiency is rare in the United States and Canada. People who get very little vitamin C for many weeks can get a disease called scurvy. Scurvy causes tiredness, swollen gums, small red or purple spots on the skin, joint pain, poor wound healing, and corkscrew hairs. Scurvy can also cause depression, bleeding gums, loose teeth, and anemia. People can die from scurvy if it is not treated.

### What are some effects of vitamin C on health?

Scientists are studying vitamin C to see how it affects health. Here are a few examples of what this research has shown.

#### Cancer

People who get a lot of vitamin C from eating fruits and vegetables might have a lower risk of getting some types of cancer. However, taking vitamin C dietary supplements doesn't seem to help prevent cancer.

It is not clear whether taking high doses of vitamin C helps treat cancer. Vitamin C dietary supplements might interact with chemotherapy and radiation therapy. If you are being treated for cancer, talk with your health care provider before taking vitamin C or other dietary supplements, especially in high doses.

#### Heart disease

Eating lots of fruits and vegetables might lower your risk of getting heart disease. However, scientists aren't sure whether vitamin C, either from food or supplements, helps protect people from heart disease. It is also not clear whether vitamin C helps keep heart disease from getting worse in people who already have it.

#### Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and cataracts

Over time, people with AMD lose the ability to see. In people who have early-stage AMD, a specific supplement with vitamin C and other ingredients might slow down the loss of vision.

Cataracts also cause vision loss. However, it is not clear whether vitamin C, either from food or dietary supplements, affects the risk of getting cataracts.

#### The common cold

When taken regularly before getting a cold, vitamin C supplements might slightly shorten the length of a cold and reduce symptoms somewhat. However, for most people, taking

vitamin C supplements does not seem to lessen the chance of getting colds. Taking vitamin C supplements also doesn't appear to be helpful after someone actually comes down with a cold.

### Can vitamin C be harmful?

Too much vitamin C might cause diarrhea, nausea and stomach cramps. The safe upper limits for vitamin C are listed below.

Birth to 12 months	Not established
Children 1–3 years	400 mg
Children 4–8 years	650 mg
Children 9–13 years	1,200 mg
Teens 14–18 years	1,800 mg
Adults	2,000 mg

### Are there any interactions with vitamin C that I should know about?

Yes. For example, taking vitamin C supplements might affect how well some medicines work, such as niacin and statins for high cholesterol. Vitamin C supplements might also interact with chemotherapy or radiation therapy for cancer.

Bottom line: Tell your doctor, pharmacist, and other health care providers about any dietary supplements and medicines you take. They can tell you if those dietary supplements might interact or interfere with your prescription or over-the-counter medicines or if the medicines might affect how your body uses vitamin C.

### Where can I find out more about vitamin C?

- Office of Dietary Supplements Health Professional Fact Sheet on Vitamin C
- Office of Dietary Supplements Consumer Fact Sheet on Vitamin C
- For advice on buying dietary supplements, see the Office of Dietary Supplements Frequently Asked Questions
- For information on the government's food guidance systems, see MyPyramid and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

#### Disclaimer

This fact sheet by the Office of Dietary Supplements gives information that should not take the place of medical advice. Talk to a doctor, registered dietitian, pharmacist, or other qualified health care provider before taking dietary supplements. They can tell you if dietary supplements are right for you and what effects they could have on your health.



For more information on this and other supplements, please visit our Web site at: <http://ods.od.nih.gov> or e-mail us at: [ods@nih.gov](mailto:ods@nih.gov)

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